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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 001670

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [SO](#)
SUBJECT: SOMALIA - ENTRENCHED SOMALILAND PRESIDENT
DETERMINED TO RETAIN POWER

REF: NAIROBI 1657

Classified By: Somalia Unit Counselor Bob Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

11. (C) Summary: Somaliland President Riyale, during a July 31 phone call with Somalia Unit Counselor, signaled unwillingness to reconsider his decision to abandon the international community-funded voter registration list. Somaliland's opposition parties are threatening to boycott the elections if the voter registration list is not used and the Parliament and Council of Elders have condemned the President and the National Electoral Commission's (NEC) actions. We believe that Riyale has rejected the voter registration list, which he had previously accepted, because he has realized that the numbers would never allow him election victory. The President is apparently willing to carry out elections without the participation of other parties and thereby risk civil unrest. We have issued a press release condemning recent developments and urging that the President re-consider. The Ambassador has sent a letter to the President urging flexibility, as well. End summary.

Riyale Entrenched;
Determined to Retain Power

12. (C) Somaliland President Riyale, during a July 31 phone call with Somalia Unit Counselor, signaled unwillingness to reconsider his decision to abandon the international community-funded voter registration list and move forward with the September 27 elections (reftel). Riyale said the list could not be used for elections and there was no time left before September 27 to make the necessary adjustments to it. Riyale said the two opposition parties had accepted the list because it was in their interest to do so. Riyale as President had greater responsibilities, and could not sacrifice Somaliland's hard-won reputation to such a flawed procedure. The government would like continued international support but was prepared to go forward without it, if the government was forced to capitulate to the list.

13. (C) Riyale reportedly reiterated the same points to the British Ambassador to Addis Ababa. Riyale said his UDUB party favored election delays in order to allow the voter list to be "cleaned up," but he personally believed Somaliland should hold elections on September 27 in the "traditional way." (Note: Previous Somaliland elections were marked by a two-step process. The first step involved registration on election day with elders and local officials presiding. The second step involving voter inking. Both steps of the process allowed for local officials to manipulate registrations and

for multiple votes to be cast. End Note.) Riyale told the British Ambassador that all parties other than his own were acting as spoilers. The NEC Chairman in an August 1 letter to donors also advocated elections without the voter registration list and claimed that a delay in elections would give an opening to al-Shabaab. Several of our contacts told us that President Riyale had met with the NEC Chair and Vice-Chair on July 26 to advocate elections without the list. We also were told that President Riyale personally pressed each of the seven NEC members to sign the letter supporting his position (reftel).

14. (C) Opposition party UCID sent a letter to donors saying that all political parties, to include the President's, had seen and agreed to the voter registration list and to subsequent independent analysis provided by the US-based firm Creative Associates. UCID said it would only take part in the forthcoming elections if the voter list is used. Echoing these sentiments, Kulmiye party leader Ahmed "Silanyo" on August 3 told us that Riyale's administration had no justification to act alone because all parties had agreed to the voter registration list. "Silanyo" urged the international community to pressure Riyale and said his party was willing to boycott the elections "right now." Some Kulmiye representatives are reportedly suggesting the party call for Riyale's impeachment. Somaliland's lower house of Parliament and the "Guurti" called on the NEC to reverse its decision on use of the voter registration list and disagreed with the expulsion of the Interpeace representative (reftel), arguing that the action reflected badly on Somaliland's international image. (Note: The "Guurti" is a council of elders which acts as Somaliland's upper house of Parliament.

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The "Guurti" in the past has been susceptible to Riyale's manipulation and has granted the President two previous election extensions. Our contacts tell us, however, that the "Guurti" is unlikely to approve another extension under the current circumstances. End Note.)

15. (C) Comment: According to the Somaliland Constitution, President Riyale's current term of office should have expired on May 15, 2008, but the date of the ballot has been re-scheduled on four different occasions. These postponements have twice entailed the formal extension of President Riyale's term of office by the "Guurti," on constitutionally dubious grounds. We believe that Riyale's most recent machinations mean he intends to retain power regardless. President Riyale and his party, along with the two opposition parties, were aware of and agreed to the voter registration list. The President until a few days ago had never made reference to the voter list as a possible impediment to the elections. Riyale now appears to be raising this issue because he realizes the numbers of registered voters will not allow him victory. At this point, any effort to "clean up" the voter registration list should be viewed as a ploy by the Riyale administration to buy time in order to manipulate would-be free and fair elections. It appears that the President is apparently willing to risk civil unrest by carrying out elections without the participation of other parties. The Ambassador has written a letter to Riyale and we have released a press statement from Nairobi expressing the USG's grave concern over recent developments in Somaliland. A telephone call to Riyale from Washington discussing the potential consequences of the course he has taken may be the next necessary step.

RANNEBERGER